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THE  
VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE

NOT RECOGNIZED BY

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

**A SERMON**

PREACHED

AT THE RE-OPENING OF THE PARISH CHURCH

OF

SAINT PETER'S IN THE EAST, OXFORD,

ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1836.

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THE following Discourse was written and delivered without the slightest intention of its subsequent publication. It having, however, been intimated to the Author, that a temperate summary of the more prominent arguments in favour of a Church Establishment, as supplied by Scripture and Ecclesiastical history, might be useful at the present moment, he has been induced to submit it to the Press.



ROMANS x. 14, 15.

*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?*

IN these words of the apostle Paul, we have an explicit assertion of the great fundamental principle upon which our Church, as a sound and legitimate branch of the universal Church of Christ, rests its right of authoritative dictation to the consciences of those whom it addresses, through the persons of its appointed ministers. We may confidently lay it down as a rule, applicable to both of the two systems of divine revelation contained in the books of the Old and of the New Testament, that they are respectively “ messages coming directly from God to an otherwise lost world, by the instrumentality of chosen human agents.” We assert then, (and on the soundness of this assertion, be it remembered, that the question mainly hinges, whether or not an established mode of worship ought to be recognized by the laws of every Christian country,) we assert, I repeat, that as the Jewish prophets of old *were*, so the ministers of

the Gospel at this moment *are*, not only authorized, but enjoined, so long as they confine themselves strictly to the letter of their commission, to expound, to dictate, to explain, the word of life, not merely as persons *invited* by their respective congregations, but as ambassadors *sent* by Christ himself; not as dependents timidly adapting an unpalatable communication to the fastidious tastes of their masters, but as heralds charged with a communication, which it is their duty to deliver in the same uncompromising terms in which they themselves first received it. These sentiments, I am well aware, are little suited to obtain a favourable reception at the present moment. No doubt they will sound harshly to ears which have been accustomed to that reckless expression of uncontrolled opinion, which marks the period in which we live; but they are not therefore the less scriptural. In fact, I have no hesitation in asserting, that unless we admit the correlative duties of irresponsible dictation on the one hand, and of willing deference to authoritative instruction on the other, (provided always that every precept inculcated be manifestly traceable to or deducible from Scripture;) unless, I repeat, we admit thus much, not only will it be impossible for Christ's ministers to preach the word with effect; "to be instant in season, out of season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine;"

but also will every thing that is vital in Gospel truth be sacrificed to the captious likings and dislikings of the human heart.

Let me then direct your attention to the following propositions, as clearly deducible from the words of revelation. They are these. First, That the Gospel covenant is a gratuitous message of mercy from God to a world so deeply sunk in sin and ignorance, as to be incapable, without the divine help, of feeling its own degradation, or of cherishing even a wish for a closer approximation to its Creator. Secondly, The sum and substance of that message is contained in the book of the revealed Scriptures, in which the stupendous fact of the great mystical sacrifice for sin, and the doctrine of faith in Christ, and of repentance, and of conversion from dead works to the holiness of a spiritual life, are explicitly declared. Thirdly, The appointed channel for the conveyance of that message was originally the person of our blessed Saviour himself: after his ascension, it was the persons of his delegated apostles: after those apostles, it was the persons of those select instruments, whom, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or from the known integrity of their lives, they had specially appointed to this important trust: and again, after those good men were called to their reward, it has been the duly ordained ministers of the Gospel, receiving successively from

hand to hand, and age after age, their respective commissions.

Now through the whole of this process we recognize, I repeat, an *external authority*, dependent for its origin and subsequent continuance not upon any human invitation or patronage, but upon the command and institution of Christ himself. And accordingly, like every other authority established for a wholesome purpose, though it may at the first view appear in the light of a privilege attached to the persons invested with it, it is in reality intended for the benefit of those parties, over whom it exercises a jurisdiction. To the former it is a charge and a duty, for the performance of which they are responsible under the most fearful sanctions. From the latter it demands, on the other hand, that honest and right-minded deference, which all legitimate government requires at the hands of the governed, in order to produce its just and most beneficial result.

It is for two reasons, my brethren, that I have chosen this discussion as the subject of this day's discourse. In the first place, on the occasion of opening afresh, for the purposes of divine worship, the ancient and truly interesting edifice in which we are now assembled, it cannot I think be inappropriate to point out the scriptural authority for that form of Church polity, which the laws of this country have more particularly sanctioned: and



secondly, it cannot, I trust, be inexpedient, in the present unsteady, not to say unhealthy, state of public feeling on this subject, to mark as specifically as possible, by way of warning, the one great diverging point, the want of a due attention to which, at the proper moment, has led gradually age after age to that painful variety of opinions, and those occasionally wide deviations from the purity of Gospel truth, which so singularly characterize our own period.

Let me then, in order to make my position clearly understood, direct your attention as briefly as I can to those statements of Scriptural and of Church history, which have more immediate reference to the discipline and spiritual government of the Christian commonwealth. In doing this, I feel indeed that I shall be going over an often trodden path, perfectly familiar to a large class of my hearers ; but I am aware at the same time, that it is the duty of a Christian preacher to address his instruction less to the learned than to the ignorant, and cheerfully to submit to the charge of dwelling upon trivial and well-known truths, rather than deprive the humblest of his hearers of their just portion of instruction.

Before then we proceed to advocate the claim of the Established Church of England to be considered as an apostolical and scriptural institution, Jesus Christ himself being its corner stone, it will be

necessary in the first place to enquire, “ what sanction the inspired books of the New Testament afford to that specific form of Church government, which we assert to have been regularly transmitted from the primitive ages down to our own times.” Now, the facts which we find recorded in those sacred writings connected with this question, though few in number, are all of them at least of a clear and decided character. St. Luke, in the first place, tells us<sup>a</sup>, that our Redeemer himself, in addition to his twelve more immediate Apostles, selected from the whole body of his followers seventy other disciples, whom he sent as preachers of his doctrines to the surrounding cities. This simple form of Church polity, which seems to have been established upon the model of that appointed by Moses for the Jewish nation, continued unchanged until the period of our Lord’s ascension into heaven ; immediately after which event, the eleven remaining Apostles (as we are informed in the first chapter of the book of the Acts) proceeded to elect Matthias into the office of Apostle and witness of the resurrection, left vacant by the apostacy and suicidal end of the traitor Judas. Shortly afterwards, in consequence of the rapidly increasing numbers of the Christian community, and accompanying need of additional helpers in the daily works of charity, the Apostles, becoming unequal to the toil of both their spiritual

<sup>a</sup> Luke x. 1.



and secular occupations, found themselves under the necessity of appointing a new order, namely, that of Deacons or assistants, on whom they might devolve the humbler labours of their ministry<sup>b</sup>. A few years later, we read, that the Gentile converts of Greece and the surrounding islands, beginning to stand in need of authorized instructors, the Christian Church assembled at Antioch received a commission from the Holy Spirit<sup>c</sup> to set apart Barnabas and Saul especially for that ministry : which command they forthwith obeyed ; and having duly given to those holy men authority by the imposition of hands, dismissed them first to Seleucia, and from thence to Cyprus. At a somewhat later period, we find the Apostles and Presbyters of the Church of Jerusalem<sup>d</sup> addressing an authoritative injunction to the Gentile converts at Antioch on the subject of some scruples entertained by the latter respecting the obligation to the observance of circumcision, and other points of the Jewish ritual. And with this fact we may close our selections from the book of the Acts.

If then we now turn from that historical work to the Epistles of St. Paul, we there find, in perfect consistency with what we have read elsewhere, that inspired teacher uniformly supporting the character which I have stated to be in my opinion inseparable from the duly commissioned

<sup>b</sup> Acts vi. 1—6.

<sup>c</sup> Acts xiii. 2.

<sup>d</sup> Acts xv. 22.

Christian minister : that is to say, addressing his respective Churches not as a favoured teacher originally invited by them, but as a messenger from God authoritatively sent to them : kindly indeed, tenderly, and even in tears, appealing from time to time to their better feelings, but also reprimanding and even threatening them, when needful, in the high language of one who had received his warrant from above. Nothing, in fact, can be less open to controversy than St. Paul's language upon these points. He asserts unequivocally his own character as Christ's ambassador, with his consequent right of dictation, of inflicting spiritual censures, and (were he inclined to demand it) of a regular provision for the supply of his bodily necessities. But the Epistles addressed by him to Timothy and Titus give us a still further insight into the form of Church government established at that period. In the two Epistles to Timothy, for instance, we learn, that that person, having been ordained to the ministry by the imposition of the hands of the Presbytery, and (as it would appear by the context) of Paul also, was subsequently appointed by that Apostle to preside over the Church of Ephesus, not in the capacity of a mere Presbyter or Teacher, but as one who, notwithstanding his youth, had authority to ordain as well Presbyters as Deacons, and juridically to examine and censure both those orders of men for any occasional delinquency. In the

Epistle to Titus, we find this latter person receiving the same authority, in equally unequivocal terms, to govern the Church established in Crete.

Such are the prominent statements which present themselves to us from the most cursory view of the inspired writings now referred to. And here then (to say nothing of other incidental facts stated in the books of the New Testament, or the many analogies suggested by the Jewish polity as related in the Old) we may, I think, assert, that we cannot by any possibility glance our eyes over the few circumstances which I have just now quoted, without admitting, that the following case is, at all events, unequivocally made out; namely, that there did exist in the Apostolical age, and under the Apostolical sanction, a threefold order of Ministers of the Gospel; namely, of Apostles; of Elders or Presbyters, (from which latter word our name of Priest is derived;) and, lastly, of Deacons. It appears also, that the original number of our Lord's Apostles was subsequently enlarged, in consequence of the increasing wants of the Church, not only by the substitution of Matthias in the place of Judas, but also by the appointment of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, and subsequently of Timothy and Titus by what would seem to be the single authority of St. Paul. In all these cases, I repeat, we find instructors deputed uniformly by external authority, and in no one instance receiving their power from the parties to whom they came as ministers of the

Gospel. Thus much then with respect to the information afforded us on this topic by the inspired Scriptures.

And now, if from them we continue our research through the uninspired records of the primitive Church, we still find the same distinction of three several classes of teachers uniformly kept up. So much so, that although from local and other circumstances other orders were subsequently established in addition to those now alluded to, we may I believe state confidently, that from the days of the Apostles until the early part of the sixteenth century, notwithstanding the multitude of discussions which took place on other points, no large community of Christians existed, in which the respective grades of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons were not acknowledged and retained.

The sixteenth century, however, opened a new and most momentous series of events to the Christian world. The stream of time had not for so many ages passed over the Church, without destroying some of its ancient land-marks, and establishing new. In the course of the long preceding period, the original purity and simplicity of the evangelical doctrine had become almost entirely overwhelmed and concealed by an accumulation of human additions, the results partly of mistaken notions of piety, partly of worldly and ambitious feelings; so that to an indifferent person, comparing for the first time the practical state of what then called itself Christianity with that

original form of it announced in the holy Scriptures, the resemblance between the one and the other would have been scarcely recognizable.—In the course of that period, the direct communication of every individual with his Maker through our one High Priest Jesus Christ had been virtually cut off; and the human minister of the Church, arrogating to himself an authority far beyond that paternal superintendence exercised and sanctioned by the first preachers of our faith, had interposed himself between God and man as the only legitimate channel for the conveyance of the divine grace.—In that period, the great fundamental Christian doctrine of a sufficient expiation of sin by the one momentous sacrifice of the Redeemer had been depreciated, if not superseded, by the gratuitous assertion of a purgatorial expiation, to be submitted to by every delinquent individual in a future state.—In that period, angels and the souls of departed human beings had been authoritatively recognized as legitimate objects of worship more accessible, and more ready to listen to prayer, than the great Almighty Creator himself.—In the course of that period, the Scriptures had become in great measure a sealed book to the large community of Christians, and traditions, partly the exaggerations of innocent primitive practices, partly the offshoots of heathen systems of philosophy, partly the deliberate inventions of secular ambition, had been



substituted in their room.—In the course of that period, the affecting sacramental commemoration of our blessed Saviour's death and sufferings had, in direct contradiction to the express words of revelation, been converted into an almost Levitical rite, in the form of a continually recurring sacrifice for sin.—And in the course of that period, the authority conferred by the Redeemer on the ministers of his word, to listen to the sorrows of the penitent, to expound to him the merciful promises of the Gospel, to reconcile him to God's visible Church in this world, and to solicit his admission to the Church of God's saints in heaven, had been elevated by an usurping Antichristian tyranny into an irrespective power of forgiveness of sins, made saleable, by an almost incredible hardihood of impiety, to all those who had worldly wealth enough to make the purchase.

The time was indeed now come, when the cup of the Church's iniquities was full; when the whole mass had become thoroughly corrupt; and when the cry of "Come ye out of her, my people," would seem to address itself to every sincere servant of Christ. But how and in what state were they to come forth from it, when almost every authority, every ruler in God's household, had touched the accursed thing, and identified himself with the very abuses which he ought to have been the foremost to denounce? The truly Christian portion of the

community did indeed come forth; but it came as sheep without the shepherd; it came, as we may imagine of the holier part of the children of Israel, when hurrying away from the worship of the golden calf, and leaving Aaron still occupied in the performance of his idolatrous rite. The Protestant Reformation under such circumstances was assuredly not only a justifiable, but an absolutely necessary, return to the original purity of the Christian doctrine;—but it should in fairness be at the same time observed, that it inflicted a severe though inevitable wound upon Church government and discipline. In consequence of that event, the promoters of that important change found themselves in many parts of Europe involved, in spite of themselves, in the dilemma of either surrendering the Gospel itself, for the purpose of maintaining the external machinery and symmetry of its polity; or of sacrificing that polity, venerable and apostolical as it was in its origin, for the sake of the Gospel. No doubt they were justified in the resolution which they finally took, though they themselves deeply lamented at the moment, and their posterity has had bitterly to lament also, the necessity of the alternative. Cut off by the course of events from further communication with their higher spiritual rulers, sincere and otherwise orthodox Christians were now found advocating from necessity a doctrine, which, under

other circumstances they would have assuredly disapproved ; a doctrine (with the solitary exception of Acrius and his scanty party in the fourth century) hitherto unacknowledged by former ages, namely, that the office of Bishop differs from that of Presbyter by conventional arrangement only, and not by original Apostolical appointment. The result of this fatal step was precisely what might have been expected. A blow was inflicted upon the Christian commonwealth from which it has never perfectly recovered, and an opening was afforded to those capricious and unscriptural innovations in religious belief, which, blending themselves with political excitement, have, during the course of the last three centuries, been productive of so much disaster to mankind.

In England, however, the disruption of the Established Church discipline occasioned by the Protestant Reformation was for a considerable time less sensibly felt, than among a large portion of the continental Churches. In this country, the resistance to papal authority being the act, as it were, of the whole nation, the Crown and the Hierarchy having in great measure gone along with the general impulse, the machinery of the ecclesiastical government, as transmitted from the Apostolical age, was fortunately left entire. It was not until the fearful persecution of Protestantism, which took place under the reign of Queen Mary, when so many



glorious confessors of the truth were driven to take refuge in foreign lands, that the democratic religious spirits, which had already taken possession of the Swiss Churches, began to spread itself among our own countrymen. The dissensions which shortly after that time began to manifest themselves between the English refugees of Frankfort and Geneva on the questions of Church authority and discipline, were a disheartening prelude to that deep bitterness of party feeling on the same subject, which in the following century convulsed the whole of this nation. It was not, indeed, immediately upon their return to their native land, that what was afterwards called the Puritan party renounced their obedience to the higher authorities of the Church. But what at first was mere discontent and alienation, soon, from concurring circumstances, ripened into open resistance. And indeed it must be owned, that the arbitrary and tyrannical display of power exercised by the Hierarchy in that unhappy moment of irritation, though it did not put their adversaries in the right, certainly put the governing and legitimate party in the wrong. But it is painful to look back upon the dissensions of a period, to which, whether as Christians or Englishmen, we can revert only with feelings of sorrow for that blindness of party, which proceeded step by step from the discussion of matters of almost absolute indifference, to civil war, and the eventual overthrow both of Church and State.

The restoration of Charles the Second brought back indeed with it the reestablishment of the ancient Church government, but the spirit of religious anarchy which had fostered the late confusions, though checked for a time, was not therefore extinguished. The number of those who, whether from sincere conscientious scruples, or from political animosity, were opposed to any external authoritative dictation on points of faith, now formed a large and acknowledged portion of the social community of this country. The consequence accordingly was, that after the Revolution of 1688, whilst the ancient Apostolical discipline was retained as the acknowledged and established religion of the state, the seceders from episcopal jurisdiction, together with the other dissentients in points of doctrine, received that open and avowed protection from the laws, to which, so long as they conduct themselves as peaceful members of society, they are manifestly entitled.

Such then, in a few words, have been the eventful circumstances under which the Established Church of England has maintained itself down to our own time. Detached from the Church of Rome, from a just abhorrence of its impurities and unscriptural innovations; and, on the other hand, detached from the seceding Protestant communities, in consequence of its clinging, alike through evil report and good report, to the usages of the Apostolical age; it occupies exactly that middle station, which, whilst

it affords the strongest presumption that it is in the right, at the same time, from the opposite classes of assailants to which it is exposed, is peculiarly open to external hatred and misrepresentation. In the eyes of one party, it has done too much : in those of the other party, it has done too little. It has cut away the superstitions and abuses of the earlier Church, whilst it has retained all that was scriptural in its doctrine. On this ground it is therefore denounced by the Romish community as a rebel. It uncompromisingly retains the whole ungarbled text of Scripture, adding nothing, and relinquishing nothing ; and on this ground it is charged by the advocates of uncontrolled liberty of opinion as superstitious, narrow-minded, and tyrannical. To the latter class of assailants its answer is, however, an easy one. It does not, and never did, profess to be a teacher of smooth and soft things ; to garble Scripture, culling this passage, and rejecting that, according as the fastidious taste, the favourite theories, or the besetting sins, of its disciples may claim their respective shares of flattery or indulgence. On the contrary, its aim is to divide rightly and honestly the whole word and counsel of God. It makes no allowance to the cravings of “ itching ears.” It dares not sacrifice truth to novelty, or encourage those hot and intemperate passions, which, either by over or by under statements, invariably distort, where they do not totally extinguish, the sound and wholesome doctrine.

If we are asked, how and by what means it is enabled to take this safe and temperate course ; I reply, that it is because it has, by the blessing of Providence, retained, in spite of the clamour of the falsely wise, that sagacious form of discipline, which received the sanction of Christ's own inspired Apostles. It is because a minister of the Established Church of England dares not, even if he would, yield to the suggestions of his own vanity, or of his love for popular applause, and adapt his preaching to the shifting opinions and tastes of the age in which he lives. He is responsible to an authorized superior for the soundness of his doctrine. He has before him the recorded and condensed summaries of scriptural truth, which have received the deliberate sanction of the best and wisest men who have adorned the reformed Church of this country, which, under every tendency to momentary indiscretion or exaggerated views, oblige him to reconsider and to recall his steps. To sum up the whole in a few words, he considers himself, as I have before observed, not *invited*, but *sent*: the commissioned instructor, not the servile creature, of the congregation he addresses: the messenger of God, acting under the sanction of the laws of the land, having a communication to make, from which he dares abstract nothing, and to which he dares add nothing.

And in a Church thus arranged, what is there, let me ask, to which, as Christians or as reasonable



beings, we would object, or which we would desire to alter? I know well what is the restless feeling suggested by a love of novelty. I am perfectly aware how strongly the natural heart of man recoils from external dictation, however highly sanctioned; how fastidiously it rejects the incessant recurrence of the same intellectual food; and how plausible, how seductive, is the cry, which would identify the utmost latitude of licentious opinion with the rights of the human understanding, and the establishment of the cause of truth. But I reply, that if there is one truth more clearly pointed out in Scripture than another, it is this; that the natural man, when left to his own original bias, is not capable, has not the most remote wish, the slightest inclination, to arrive at unmixed truth. Our real longing is after truth stripped of all its offensive but salutary harshness; after soft and flattering things; after doctrines which will not place us in enmity but in peace with our own carnal appetites and passions; which will suggest palliations for our vices, and dignify even our unchristian propensities with the name of virtues. Who ever heard the habitual drunkard inviting lectures upon temperance; the sensualist encouraging exhortations to self-restraint; the lunatic lamenting over his blinded intellect, and imploring the aid of the physician? And may I not add, (for the marvel would be no less,) who ever heard of the natural man clamouring for whole-

some Christian instruction and evangelical restraint? It is easy indeed for all of us to be rigorous in our censure of vices for which we have no natural inclination. The prodigal can without difficulty point out the baseness of avarice, and the miser can descant upon the folly of extravagance; but it is not by this self-complacent process that the deep-seated imperfections of our moral nature are to be got rid of. We must learn a much more homely and self-denying lesson, before we can attain to even that wisdom which is of this world. And what is true with regard to moral habits in general, is more particularly and more emphatically true with respect to the proper inculcation of religious principle. The preacher who is invited by, and dependent for his means of subsistence upon, the congregation he addresses, ever must and will be exposed to the temptation of making his doctrines rather agreeable than wholesome. He will too often be disposed to withhold his chastisement from the besetting sins of his hearers, and to denounce those offences only which they can bear to hear of with undisturbed consciences, and perhaps with self-complacency. More especially, with regard to the revealed mysteries of our faith, great would be the danger, under such circumstances, lest part of the entire counsel of God should be withheld by him, out of deference to the fastidious tastes and prejudices and criticisms of men. The fundamental and peculiar truths of

Christianity, the momentous doctrines of the Trinity, of our Lord's divinity, of the Atonement, of assisting Grace, would too often be slurred over, or explained away as topics of offence; and the sublime message of "glory to God, and good will towards men," would dwindle imperceptibly, but inevitably, into a mere lifeless code of human ethics.

Against such abuses and such extinction of divine truth, *an established Christian ministry*, the independence of which is guaranteed by national law, and the authority of whose doctrines emanates from God himself, is, I repeat, the only effectual preventive. Such an establishment is ours. For the soundness of the lessons which it teaches, it points to the whole revealed book of Scripture: for its discipline, and its internal resources for the coercion of unsound opinions, it claims the sanction of the Apostolical age itself: for its worldly independence, so far as to be removed from the temptation of accommodating its doctrines to the corrupt tastes of mankind, it is indebted to the wise liberality of our ancestors, who, in setting apart a portion of the national wealth for ecclesiastical purposes, have conferred an important benefit upon the laity of this land no less than upon its clergy. For let it be remembered, that to the poor an endowed Church is necessarily a cheap Church. As reasonably might the humbler classes complain of the existence of almshouses, and of

other public works of mercy, as that the maintenance of the preachers of the Gospel is not left to be wrung from their scanty means, but is provided for from independent and external resources. But this is not all. There is one most important advantage possessed by an Established Church, to which no voluntary associations of however sincerely disposed Christians can ever attain. An endowed Clergy admits of being located by the government of the land over every portion of town or country where their services may be needed. Were there, on the contrary, no teachers of religion excepting such as should be appointed and maintained by their several communities, populous and wealthy towns might indeed still be enabled to supply themselves with the necessary degree of evangelical instruction, but the villages, the hamlets, and the cottage, would be entirely neglected. Under such a state of things the word "pagan" would soon come to have once more its ancient signification, designating at the same time the inhabitant of a village, and one to whom the light of Gospel truth has not yet penetrated.

In making the foregoing observations, my brethren, it has been far, very far, from my intention to throw any unnecessary blame upon those persons who, from sincerely conscientious views, have withdrawn themselves from the discipline of our Church. To their own and our own Master,



to one who will not scrupulously weigh the errors of the judgment where the intention of the heart is sound, we leave them. May they meet with that mercy, through the Saviour's merits, to which we all look. My object has been, not to shew how far, and in what exact degree, they are wrong, but merely to assert, that, so far as we have the means of forming an opinion, our Church is at all events *in the right*. Whether it be safe for Christians to deviate in any degree from those ways and that discipline which our Lord's own disciples appointed, I am not prepared to venture an opinion; but of this I am at all events sure, that it must be the safer, it must be the more humble-minded, and therefore the most truly Christian, course to cling to and to maintain them. This is all which a minister of the Church of England appears to me called upon to assert: this he must do, if he is sincere; and this he *may* do, with perfect charity and good will to those without. He would rather, it is true, see them united with himself, as in one faith, so under one uniform course of discipline. But where their secession is occasioned by no unworthy motives, no jealousy, no envy, no emulation, no wish to derogate from the whole will and counsel of God, he will not therefore consider them as ceasing to be members of that invisible Church of Christ, which we trust will one day in heaven be found to extend more widely, than the limits which, in our present

imperfect state of knowledge, we feel justified in prescribing to it upon earth.

Here then, with this hope for the future blessed reunion of the whole community of God's servants, however at present scattered and disunited, let me conclude with the words of that sublime description of that heavenly Church, afforded to us in the Revelation of St. John. "I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

To Him, the ever-blessed Triune Godhead, as by the redeemed saints in heaven, so by every community of his followers upon earth, be attributed all honour, power, majesty, and dominion. Amen.

THE END.



